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CHURCH-NICARAGUA

BY ROBERT PARRY

WASHINGTON (AP) -- FORMER SEN. FRANK CHURCH, SPEAKING AT A CONFERENCE ON REPORTED U.S. COVERT ACTIONS AGAINST NICARAGUA, CALLED THURSDAY FOR AN END TO VIOLENT CIA OPERATIONS AIMED AT DISRUPTING OR OVERTHROWING FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS.

"IF IT'S WRONG IN TIME OF PEACE FOR A FOREIGN POWER TO SEND SECRET AGENTS INTO THIS COUNTRY TO ENGAGE IN BRIBERY, BLACKMAIL, ASSAULT OR MURDER, THEN IT CANNOT BE RIGHT FOR US TO ENGAGE IN THE SAME KIND OF VIOLENCE IN OTHER COUNTRIES," THE IDAHO DEMOCRAT SAID.

"SUCH CRIMINAL ACTIVITY ON OUR PART SHOULD BE STOPPED COLD, ONCE AND FOR ALL."

CHURCH, WHO CHAIRED A SENATE COMMITTEE IN THE MID-1970S THAT CRITICIZED PAST CIA ACTIONS, SAID HE WAS CONCERNED THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION WAS ROUTINELY RETURNING TO THE PRACTICE OF USING COVERT ACTIONS TO SOLVE DISPUTES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES.

CHURCH SAID COVERT ACTIONS -- WHICH HE CALLED "A CONCEALED FORM OF WARFARE" -- SHOULD BE USED IN ONLY RARE CASES WHEN U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY IS CLEARLY AND DIRECTLY THREATENED.

ACCORDING TO PUBLISHED REPORTS, PRESIDENT REAGAN HAS APPROVED COVERT CIA ACTIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA DESIGNED TO DISRUPT THE ALLEGED FLOW OF CUBAN SUPPLIES TO SALVADORAN GUERRILLAS AND TO DESTABILIZE THE LEFTIST NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT.

THE ADMINISTRATION HAS NEITHER CONFIRMED OR DENIED THE REPORTS.

CHURCH SAID HE HAD NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT NICARAGUA, BUT WARNED THAT SUCH COVERT ACTIVITIES COULD FURTHER HARM AMERICA'S IMAGE ABROAD, AS SOME EARLIER CIA OPERATIONS DID.

"THE UNITED STATES IS TODAY REGARDED WITH GRAVE SUSPICION AND DISTRUST, IN THE EYES OF MILLIONS OF ONCE FRIENDLY FOREIGN PEOPLE, WHO NOW SEE PRECIOUS LITTLE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US AND THE SOVIET UNION," CHURCH SAID.

"THEY HAVE COME TO REGARD BOTH NATIONS AS INTRUSIVE IMPERIALISTS."

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